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RUEHTRO/AMEMBASSY TRIPOLI PRIORITY
RHMFIS/CDR USEUCOM VAIHINGEN GE PRIORITY
RUEAIIA/CIA WASHDC PRIORITY
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C O N F I D E N T I A L NIAMEY 001446

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DEPARTMENT FOR AF/W, INR/AA AND DS/ITA

E.O. 12958: DECL: 12/11/2017
TAGS: MOPS ASEC PGOV PTER NG
SUBJECT: NIGER SECURITY UPDATE

REF: NIAMEY 1444 (NOTAL)

Classified By: Donald W. Koran, DCM, reasons 1.4 (b/d)

Landmine in Tahoua

¶1. (U) A vehicle struck a landmine the evening of December 10 near the wrestling stadium in Tahoua. We have heard reports that one person was killed and two people were injured.

¶2. (U) Tahoua is the site of this year's December 18 Republic Day festivities. President Tandja, a large number of Ministers, and the diplomatic corps are scheduled to attend.

Landmine in Maradi

¶3. (U) In a posting on its website, the MNJ denies placing the mine in Maradi that blew up a vehicle on December 10 (reftel), and blames the Nigerien Armed Forces (FAN) for the incident.

Tuareg civilians killed in the north

¶4. (U) The FAN on December 10 issued a statement that it had accidentally killed seven Tuareg civilians in northern Niger the previous day (reftel). The statement said that the incident occurred following a firefight between FAN troops and MNJ fighters, and that the authorities had earlier warned the civilians not to travel in the area. The FAN expressed regret for the incident, noting that one of those killed was related to FAN soldiers.

¶5. (U) The MNJ countered the FAN announcement with a posting on its website claiming that there was no clash between the FAN and MNJ as the FAN claimed, and that the seven civilians had been executed. The MNJ cited the alleged absence of bullet holes in the civilian vehicles as contradicting the FAN claim that the civilians had been caught in a firefight. They said that among the civilians killed were two Libyan citizens. (We understand that some of those Nigeriens killed were of mixed Tuareg/Arab ancestry.) The MNJ claims that the civilians were following a route that the authorities had told them to take. They also claimed that the civilians were carrying large sums of money, which was missing.

¶6. (SBU) The bodies of the victims, as well as the vehicles in which they had been traveling, have reportedly been taken to Agadez. We have no independent confirmation of the MNJ's claims that there were no bullet holes in the vehicles. It is not clear how the MNJ would have the level of detail about the incident that it has posted.

¶7. (C) We have heard various other explanations of the incident, including that the civilians were in fact linked to the MNJ, or that they were involved in drug trafficking.

Comment

¶8. (C) It's hard to see a rational motive for either the GON or the MNJ placing landmines in Tahoua or Maradi, where the likely victims would be civilians. This raises the possibility that another, unknown, group may have been responsible for the incidents. (We still don't know who was responsible for placing a landmine at a fuel depot in Dosso on November 21. The GON initially blamed the MNJ, but the Foreign Minister later said was not the MNJ.) Regardless of who laid the Tahoua and Maradi mines, they raise serious security concerns. Embassy is seeking to learn more about the above incidents, and the EAC will meet the afternoon of December 11 to discuss security implications.

¶9. (U) Tripoli minimize considered
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